

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-14 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-02 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 SP-02
SS-15 ICA-20 AID-05 PC-05 ACDA-12 /123 W
-----092463 191436Z /45

R 191155Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9569

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON
USUN NEW YORK 2994
AMCONSUL KADUNA

UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 2 LAGOS 08897

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PGOV, PDEV, NI, SHUM
SUBJECT: PUBLIC AND PRESS REACTION TO GOVERNMENT CHANGES

REF: LAGOS 8732

1. EDITORIALS IN MAJOR DAILY NEWSPAPERS
UNRESERVEDLY LAUDED TRANSITIONAL GOVERN-
MENT CHANGES ANNOUNCED JULY 14 BY HEAD OF STATE
OBASANJO. ON JULY 18 CORRESPONDENTS OF PUNCH
IN ALL STATE CAPITALS REPORTED THAT PEOPLE
WERE UNANIMOUS IN WELCOMING THE CHANGES AND
BELIEVE THE ACTION WILL RESULT IN FREER
ELECTIONS NEXT YEAR AS THE NEWLY APPOINTED
MILITARY ADMINISTRATORS ARE LIKELY TO BE MORE
INDEPENDENT DURING ELECTIONS THAN THE GOVERNORS
WHO HAD ENTRENCHED THEMSELVES IN THE VARIOUS
STATES. ACCORDING TO A PUNCH EDITORIAL:
"FOR SOME TIME, THERE HAS BEEN A DEMAND FOR THE
REASSIGNMENT OF THE GOVERNORS, SOME OF WHOM HAVE
BECOME UNPOPULAR IN THEIR AREAS OF JURISDICTION.
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THAT THE ADMINISTRATIONZIF D AT LEAST HEARTENED TO
THIS DEMAND IS ANOTHER VICTORY FOR DEMOCRACY.
IT MUST, HOWEVER, BE PLACED ON RECORD THAT MANY
OF THESE GOVERNORS PERFORMED THEIR DUTIES
CREDITABLY."

2. ON THIS TOPIC, JULY 17 NIGERIAN TRIBUNE SAID:

"THE REMOVAL OF THE MILITARY GOVERNORS IS PARTICULARLY WELCOME BECAUSE SOME OF THE GOVERNORS HAVE LONG OUT-LIVED THEIR USEFULNESS. THEY WERE ALREADY BEHAVING LIKE THEIR PREDECESSORS AND RUNNING THEIR STATES LIKE PERSONAL ESTATES. SOME OF THEM HAVE ACQUIRED CONSIDERABLE WEALTH THROUGH PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT SINCE THEY TOOK OFFICE. AND THEY HAVE CREATED A NUMBER OF ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS EMBARRASSING TO THE FEDERAL MILITARY GOVERNMENT AND UNHELPFUL TO THE NEXT CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT. BUT, ALTHOUGH THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WAS WELL AWARE OF THIS SITUATION IT SEEMD RELUCTANT TO ACT DECISIVELY AGAINST THE ERRING GOVERNORS FOR FEAR OF HARMING THE PUBLIC IMAGE OF THE REGIME. IT HAS NOW DONE THE RIGHT THING UNDER THE CONVENIENT COVER OF THE DISENGAGEMENT PROCESS."

3. MOST OF THE EDITORIALS STRESSED NOT ONLY THAT THE ANNOUNCED CHANGES ONCE AGAIN DEMONSTRATE THE SERIOUS COMMITMENT OF THE PRESENT MILITARY ADMINISTRATION TO TURN OVER TO CIVILIAN RULE BUT THAT THEY WILL PREPARE MEMBERS OF THE ARMED FORCES "PSYCHOLOGICALLY AND ORGANIZATIONALLY" FOR THEIR RETURN TO THE BARRACKS. NEW NIGERIAN, JULY 18, NOTED THAT "DOUBTS WHICH HAD BEGUN TO GATHER OVER THE DETERMINATION TO HAND OVER POWER TO UNCLASSIFIED

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CIVILIANS ON THE STIPULATED DATE WERE SUDDENLY DEFUSED. AND FOR THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN THE POLITICS OF CRISIS, A FIRM WARNING, IN A CLEAR AND UNAMBIGUOUS LANGUAGE, WAS DELIVERED TO THE EFFECT THAT ALL FURTHER PROVOCATIVE ACTS INTENDED TO TAKE THE WHEEL OF GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT ANY LONGER BE TOLERATED, RATHER THE SEVEREST MEASURES WOULD BE METED OUT TO DEAL WITH SUCH SITUATIONS." THE TRIBUNE ADDED: "THERE IS ANOTHER GOOD REASON FOR THE CHANGE. IT ENABLES THE MILITARY GOVERNORS TO INTEGRATE INTO THE ARMED FORCES WITHOUT MUCH DIFFICULTY. AN ABRUPT CHANGE AT THE END OF THE MILITARY ADMINISTRATION WOULD HAVE PUT ON THEM A HEAVY STRAIN. THE SUDDENNESS OF THE CHANGE FROM GOVERNMENT HOUSE TO THE BARRACKS MAY BY THEN BE TOO MUCH FOR THEM TO BEAR. AND A FEW OF THEM MIGHT BE TEMPTED TO DISCOURAGE THE MOVEMENT TOWARDS CIVILIAN RULE OR EVEN OBSTRUCT IT*"

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INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-02 SP-02 SS-15
ICA-20 AID-05 PC-05 IO-14 ACDA-12 /123 W
-----092563 191437Z /45

R 191155Z JUL 78
FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9570
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON
USUN NEW YORK 2995
AMCONSUL KADUNA

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4. SEVERAL EDITORIALS ENDED UP BY GIVING THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT A PAT ON THE BACK. ACCORDING TO PUNCH "ALL IN ALL, THIS ADMINISTRATION HAS DONE ITSELF AND THE NATION PROUD NOT ONLY BY KEEPING TO ITS POLITICAL PROGRAM, BUT ALSO BY NOT ALLOWING THE MILITARY TO BE UNDULY POLITICIZED AFTER MORE THAN A DECADE OF POLITICAL TEMPTATIONS. NIGERIA CAN THUS LOOK FORWARD TO A DISCIPLINED AND PROFESSIONAL ARMY TO DEFEND IT AGAINST EXTERNAL AGGRESSION OR INTERNAL SUBVERSION." DAILY SKETCH, JULY 18, SAID: "BOTH THE OFFICERS AND MEN OF THE ARMED FORCES OF THIS GREAT NATION SHOULD FEEL SATISFIED OF A POLITICAL JOB WELL DONE SINCE 1966. THEY DESERVE THE ACCLAMATION OF FLUAFOCIATIVE CIVILIANS, WHO SHOULD NOW BE LEFT TO REMAIN THANKFUL THROUGH THEIR DETERMINED, PEACEFUL EXIT FROM THE POLITICAL SCENE OF THIS COUNTRY." THE TRIBUNE WAS LESS LAUDATORY SAYING: "THERE IS NOT DOUBT THAT THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION IN PARTICULAR HAS TRIED ITS BEST TO GIVE NIGERIA A GOOD GOVERNMENT, WITHIN ITS OWN LIGHT. IT IS ONLY THAT THE CITIZEN WOULD HAVE BEEN HAPPIER UNCLASSIFIED

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WITH LESS CASES OF PERSONAL INJUSTICE, WITH LESS INFLATION, WITH LESS HIGH-PRESSURE LIVING, WITH

LESS INCIDENCE OF VIOLENT ROBBERY, WITH LESS PUBLIC CORRUPTION, AND WITH MORE SENSE OF NATIONAL DISCIPLINE." IT DID, HOWEVER, SINGLE OUT TWO FEDERAL COMMISSIONERS FOR SPECIAL PRAISE: "WITH REGARD TO COMMISSIONERS, THE RETIREMENT OF MAJOR-GENERALS ADEFOPE AND OLULEYE HAS NOT COME AS A SURPRISE. THEY HAD WANTED TO GO MANY MONTHS AGO. THE RETURN OF COLONEL BUHARI, BRIGADIER GARBA TO THE ARMY IS UNDERSTANDABLE BUT BOTH OF THEM WILL BE MISSED. COLONEL BUHARI IS THE BEST OIL MINISTER THIS COUNTRY HAS HAD SINCE THE ADVENT OF THE MILITARY REGIME. IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT WE MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN IN THE PRESENT OILY MESS IF HE HAD BEEN IN THE SADDLE DURING THE CRAZY DAYS OF 1973 AND 1974. BRIGADIER GARBA HAS BEEN A WORTHY AMBASSADOR OF THE COUNTRY DURING HIS TERM AS COMMISSIONER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS. IN THE EARLY STAGES HE APPEARED TO BE CARRYING OUT POLICIES IN WHICH HE DID NOT ALTOGETHER BELIEVE BUT THE GOVERNMENT'S LATER CHANGE OF DIRECTION APPARENTLY ACCORDED WITH HIS OWN PERSONAL CONVICTIONS AND MODERATE TENDENCIES. HE HAS UNDOUBTEDLY BEEN A SUCCESSFUL MINISTER, AND HAS CARVED FOR HIMSELF A PLACE IN HISTORY. BUT IT IS CORRECT THAT HE AND OTHERS SHOULD RETURN TO THE BARRACKS BECAUSE THAT, AFTER ALL, IS WHERE THEY BELONG."

5. THE DAILY TIMES, JULY 18, SAW A LESSON IN THE FMG'S ACTIONS TO BE APPLIED TO THE FUTURE: "IT IS NECESSARY THAT NIGERIAN CITIZENS, NOT ONLY ASPIRING POLITICIANS, SHOULD ALSO MAKE SERIOUS UNCLASSIFIED

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EFFORTS TO MAKE A SUCCESS OF THE CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT WHICH WILL DIRECT THE AFFAIRS OF THIS COUNTRY AS FROM OCTOBER NEXT YEAR....IS IT TOO MUCH TO EXPECT OUR 'FOUNDING FATHERS,' MEMBERS OF THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY, TO DEMONSTRATE IN A SIMILAR SPIRIT, THEIR INTEGRITY AND SINCERITY BY VOLUNTARILY OPTING OUT OF IMMEDIATE POST-MILITARY POLITICS, AMONG OTHER THINGS, TO DEMONSTRATE THAT THEY ARE FAR MORE CONCERNED TO GIVE THE COUNTRY THE BEST CONSTITUTION THEY CAN DEVISE, RATHER THAN REGARDING THEIR MEMBERSHIP OF THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO GAIN AN UNFAIR HEAD START IN THE SERIES OF ELECTORAL RACES NEXT YEAR?"
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: GOVERNMENT REFORM, PRESS COMMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 jul 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 jan 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978LAGOS08897
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780296-0537
Format: TEL
From: LAGOS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780743/aaaabkiy.tel
Line Count: 222
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: c3cab370-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 LAGOS 8732
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29 mar 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1958451
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PUBLIC AND PRESS REACTION TO GOVERNMENT CHANGES
TAGS: PGOV, PDEV, SHUM, SOPN, NI
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/c3cab370-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014